

INTERVIEW I

DATE: March 10, 1981
INTERVIEWEE: BAILEY SHEPPARD
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Mr. Sheppard's office, the Bramlette Building, Longview,
Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: I wanted to ask you about the first time you met Lyndon Johnson.

S: The first time I met him was in Austin. I was introduced to him by Edward Clark, whom he later made ambassador to Australia. Shortly thereafter, I went into the army in the 36th Division. And during the race in which he lost to [W. Lee] O'Daniel, he had it won until St. Augustine County, which was Ed Clark's home county--and of course Ed was in Austin--changed about five or six thousand votes. A man came, Paul Bramlette, who is now deceased, and told him he could handle it either way in St. Augustine County if he had the money, so Bramlette later related to me. But at that time didn't anybody put up any money for him around here. In fact, I imagine I was the only active lawyer, except maybe Fred Erisman, who actually supported Johnson.

G: Was it a question of wanting to make [Coke] Stevenson governor?
Or was it legitimate support for O'Daniel in 1941?

S: I don't know why they changed the vote, the trend in St. Augustine County, except that this man just said he could do it. Whether it was done by counting the ballots afterward, after the election--

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I don't think--Ben Ramsey, who is quite a close friend of Clark's, and Smith Ramsey's brother, was down there in St. Augustine. Ben was lieutenant governor, or in the Senate at least. I would doubt that there was any trend other than just this man could turn it around. And he did. As a result Johnson was beaten by just a few votes.

G: I gather a lot of that was Dies support. Martin Dies votes that went to O'Daniel.

S: Yes. It could have been. It could have been.

G: Did Jim Ferguson play a role in that? Do you know?

S: So far as I know, he did not. And in later years Johnson and Mrs. Ferguson became very good friends.

G: Well, can you recall participating in any campaign meetings in 1941, Johnson strategy meetings?

S: No, I did not. Because I was in the 36th Division in the army during that race.

G: Did you have any contact with Johnson during the war?

S: Yes. I sure did. I had been in the army five years. The war was over and I had enough points to be discharged, but I'd been transferred from the Eighth Service Command where I was in the Intelligence to Fort Holabird at Baltimore, and I had an opportunity to see Johnson at that time. I wanted to get out of the army since I'd been in there five years. The war was over with both Japan and Germany, but I just couldn't get anybody to help me get out. So I went over to see [Johnson]--he was then a congressman, Johnson--and told him

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my story, which was that I had to get out on a business hardship. We had drilled a bunch of wells; I'd gone in with four other people and drilled these wells down at East White Point across the bay from Corpus Christi, and all four of them died during the war period. And it needed somebody to run it. For that reason, I was trying to get out on a business hardship. And I got it through the Holabird commanding officers, but when it got to Washington, they turned me down. So I got hold of Congressman Johnson and I told him that I needed some help. And he said, "I will do everything I can to get you out."

He went on up finally through the various generals to the army forces general, and he turned him down. So he went to the judge advocate general or the adjutant general who was the last authority on it. And that night he called me in Baltimore and said, "Your papers are on the way to Holabird. You can pick them up in the morning and report"--somewhere there in Maryland, I've forgotten where--"and be out of the army tomorrow." So that was the contact I had with him while I was in the army.

I later had some business in Washington for which I needed a lawyer, and I went to see a congressman from Missouri whose name escapes me right now. I had been in business in Missouri and I asked this man if he'd recommend a real good lawyer to represent me before a board up there. I told him that I had Congressman Johnson, Lyndon Johnson, who was going to do everything he could for me. And he said, "Hell, you don't need a lawyer. You've got the best lawyer

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in Washington right now, even though he hasn't got a license." And sure enough, Johnson eventually [worked it out]. They had accused me of violating a presidential order and I was going to contest it in the federal courts. But the Attorney General finally, Johnson went to see him, and he issued a ruling that the presidential order was unconstitutional, went beyond the powers of the President.

G: What did the order have to do with? Do you recall?

S: It did with the allocation of grease. I was in the soap business.

G: Did you have any association with LBJ at all on the building of the Big Inch pipeline and his role in that?

S: No. That was also built about the time I was in the army.

G: Did he play a role in that, do you know? Do you have any secondary knowledge of it?

S: I think he possibly did, but that's just conjecture on my part. I don't know it.

G: Who would be a good one to talk to about that?

S: Well, I don't know of anybody around here that would absolutely know anything about it. He wasn't unfriendly with the Browns.

G: They did some of the building on it, I gather.

S: Well, they finally ended up owning it.

G: Yes, Texas Eastern, but I understand they also did some of the initial construction.

S: Well, I'm sure they did.

G: Well, now, your congressman was [Wright] Patman, is that right?

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S: No, my congressman was Lindley Beckworth.

G: I see. Okay. Did you work through him as well as Johnson or did you just bypass your own?

S: Lindley had about as much influence in Washington as I did. Anything I wanted to try to get done in Washington, I went to Johnson.

G: Well, normally congressmen don't want to do something for another's constituent without going through the other congressman.

S: Well, Lyndon Johnson did a lot of good things for me. I would have to say that outside of my father, I believe he did more for me than anybody else.

G: Let me ask you about his relationship with Carl Estes.

S: Okay. I can tell you from [the beginning]. I was in Austin on other business and I was in Ed Clark's office. Johnson called up there and said to [us], "Where can I meet you all?" Well, I was staying at the Driskill and Clark told him, "Well, we'll meet you over there in--" whatever my room was. Johnson came in--Clark and I were already there--and he said, "Well, before you all start, I want to tell you I'm going to run for the Senate and I'll have Stevenson as an opponent. And I'm going to run well in East Texas and especially up in Gregg County and that area." Of course, Clark had been stationed with me up here in the attorney general's department and we were prosecuting people running hot oil, and we knew Carl Estes quite well. And either I asked him or Clark asked him, "Where do you get this information that you're going to run real well in East Texas?" And he said, "Well, the editor of the paper up there

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is going to be strong for me and he's going to do everything in the world he can to help me." I said, "You mean Carl Estes?" And he said, "Yes." He said, "I'll get a letter from him, a telephone call from him, a telegram from him urging me to run" and so forth. And Carl did help him every way that he could with the paper, probably to the extent of hurting him, because the paper was not popular at all. Neither was Estes. Estes was a rather overbearing type of person.

G: Why wasn't he popular? Just because people resented being told what to do?

S: Estes was unpopular because, number one, if anybody tried to start a paper here, he'd go around to the merchants and tell them, "All right"--and he did do James Henry on the TV station the same way--"if you run one ad with him, you'll never run another ad in the Longview News and Journal." Just such stuff as that. He was very unpopular. In fact, I was trying to help Lieutenant Governor--oh, he ran against Jerry Mann. I know him real well and his son is a very good friend of mine, and I'll tell you his name in just a minute. At that time, I was representing Clint Murchison, Sid Richardson, people like that. I had a good clientele. But this old boy came over here from Marshall and made a speech at the courthouse and he used as his text Carl Estes and the Longview Daily News, Daily Journal, whatever they want to call it. We spent at least ten dollars for every vote that we got for--oh, who was lieutenant governor under Allred? He's a very wealthy man. He's an old man

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now down there in Austin. He's the biggest contributor to charitable institutions in Austin. I'm getting a little old and I can't remember too well, but--

G: He was lieutenant governor.

S: Yes. He ran for attorney general. Woodul, Walter Woodul! And without criticizing Woodul one time, this man from Marshall, who later went to Houston and went to work for one of the oil companies as a lawyer, a very good speaker, took as his text the Longview News Journal and Carl Estes in particular and was able to just swamp Woodul in this county.

Getting back to the time that we talked to Johnson about running, he told us he was going to run, he said it would be in the papers in the morning. Both Clark and myself told him, "You're making a serious mistake. You can't put your finger on Estes and before you get through, you're going to learn that." He said, "Oh, y'all just don't like him for some reason or other," and didn't pay any attention to us. The night of the election--it was between Stevenson and Johnson--when it appeared that Stevenson had won it, Estes called Johnson up, because Johnson called me just as soon as he hung up from talking to Estes. And he said, "That s.o.b. You were right about him. You and Ed Clark were right about him from the word go. He just called me up and told me he was glad I got beat."

G: Why was that? Was there something that Johnson did that angered Estes?

S: No, I'm sure it wasn't. That was just the type person [Estes was].

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G: Well, I've got the returns from Gregg County and there was a big shift from--

S: Sure! It turned completely around. Johnson would have won it hands down if Gregg County hadn't turned around.

G: He did win it in the first primary.

S: Oh, yes, big.

G: And then Stevenson has a much larger total and Johnson has a--well, was that, do you think, Estes' doing? Do you think Estes--?

S: I think it contributed in that he just had so much stuff in the paper about Johnson--

G: I see.

S: --that people resented it.

G: Another thing that is reflected in the correspondence is that the blacks didn't turn out in the run-off, that they didn't vote, that someone kept them away from the polls. That's something that Ted Ryder's reporting in one of those letters. Do you recall this, and if so, who kept them away from the polls?

S: Well, I know they don't vote heavily, but I don't know what kept them away, except that a bunch of influential people here who voted for Johnson in the first primary turned around and supported Stevenson publicly in the ads in the papers. Now, Johnson always thought that the county judge here got Ted Ryder to--Ted was in charge of the voting machines. He always thought that maybe Ted ginned up the vote machines, got a different count on them, but that isn't true.

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- G: What about Tracy Flanagan [?] and Fred Erisman? Did they switch, do you recall?
- S: No, I doubt if they switched. I think they voted for Johnson, but they didn't do any work for him. Now, Fred had tremendous influence in this county, and Flanagan didn't.
- G: Did big oil contribute to Stevenson in that 1948 campaign? Did they put money into Stevenson's campaign?
- S: Well, I read there where somebody said they did. I don't know.
- G: You don't have any recollection?
- S: I don't.
- G: Throughout Johnson's career, did he receive support from the oil people in Texas?
- S: No.
- G: Did they oppose him?
- S: I would say that the major oil companies all opposed him.
- G: Was there a division between the majors and the independents in terms of their politics or who they supported?
- S: I would say that there was, yes. I think there is.
- G: What was the reason behind it? What were the different economic interests that would cause them to be, say, more attracted to Johnson than the majors would be?
- S: Well, I don't know that the independents were more attracted to Johnson. The thing that hurt Johnson the worst were these very influential men, big men in chamber of commerce, big men in the churches, telling this story that Johnson came through here and

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picked Swifty Davis up, that he was a nigger lover and that he wanted to turn all the Negroes loose and do more for them than Jesus Christ had done.

G: Well, they were loose, weren't they?

S: Yes. But--

(Interruption)

--[I'd] say that and these influential people who turned against Johnson changed the vote.

G: Was the Charles Devall machine a factor?

S: I didn't know he had a machine.

G: Really?

S: I do know this, that the morning after the vote count that Johnson called me and asked me to pick Charles Devall up and go down in Rusk County, that Charles had got a rumor that they'd had a miscount down there. And we went, and sure enough, we picked him up a hundred and twenty some-odd votes that had been credited to Stevenson. We got the Democratic county chairman, went out and canvassed these boxes.

G: So he was--

S: He supported Johnson, yes. And Carl Estes supported him, but Carl wrote an editorial--now SWEPCO, Southwestern Power and Electric, was bitterly opposed to Johnson.

G: Why?

S: On account of Johnson had always been a friend of the rural electrification, which was cutting into their business.

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G: Anything else on that campaign that you feel is significant?

S: Well, I don't know of anybody in Smith County that really did any work. Now the day before the election, Joe Sheehy came over here-- he'd gone to school with Johnson down at San Marcos--and wanted to know if we'd done anything over here in Gregg County. And I said, "Hell, right up there in Van Zandt County that joins you, y'all haven't done doodley." When Johnson got his helicopter, I had to pay all the bills up there and get it advertised and get cards sent out to everybody. And they'd hit people up in Tyler and nobody'd helped them.

When his helicopter came to Henderson on the first day, he started out, I think, maybe in Terrell and then I don't know, but anyway, at two o'clock he got to Henderson. You know who was there?

G: Who?

S: I picked up Ted Ryder and we went over there. There was one old pensioner, an old, old man, Mrs. Johnson, and that was all. Mrs. [Gene] Lasseter wasn't there. She damn sure knew it, should have been there, but she wasn't. I think old Log Lasseter, her husband, talked her out of supporting Johnson. Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Lasseter were close personal friends.

Then that night Johnson was going to land at a ball game in Marshall out in center field. The pilot got the Gregg County airport confused with a little local airport out here and he ran out of gas. I went over to Marshall to see him, and of course he was in a hotel. Boy, was he mad he didn't get to go to that ball game

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and didn't get to land in the helicopter. And he was just raising hell with the two boys that were with him and everybody else. And he asked me, he said, "Isn't there something you can do about it?" I said, "Yes, if you tell me what to do, I'll get it done." He said, "Can you get a gasoline truck to get ahead of me so that when I land throughout Northeast Texas, the gasoline truck will be there and will refuel us." I got up early the next morning and went out here to see E. K. Bennett, who was the Skelly dealer. He got a man to drive a truck, we loaded the truck full of gas, and it stayed ahead of him from here. He left Marshall, went to Jefferson and they refueled him at Jefferson and then from there to, oh, I don't know, Texarkana, Paris and around. The man was gone a couple of days in the truck.

G: That must have been a terrible logistical problem to try to keep that helicopter supplied with gasoline.

S: They did it.

G: Was the helicopter effective in that campaign? Did it draw people out?

S: Well, I think it probably did. It didn't draw them out in Henderson. There wasn't nobody over there. I don't know who you talked to in Henderson, but I'll guarantee you that I've named the people that were there.

G: Did you ever go to any of these other Johnson rallies where there were good crowds here?

S: Oh, I got him a good crowd here, yes.

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G: Was he effective when he came here and spoke?

S: I think he was. Charlie Devall came over and met with him in his room. He told him that somebody was going to heckle a lot.

G: How did he know that?

S: Charlie?

G: Yes, that someone was going to heckle?

S: Well, it was a group that was going to heckle. I don't know how he knew it, but it didn't happen.

G: Oh, really?

S: I got hold of the sheriff's department and told them about it and they had a lot of deputies there. He had a good crowd here, yes.

G: Would you and others meet with him and get him to focus on local issues that he might use in his speech to appeal to the people here or would he just give a set speech or what sort of a--?

S: Oh, we'd talk to him, yes. You know, about what was popular and what was unpopular and what to say and what to stay away from, if he could, and so forth.

He had almost as good a crowd here as he had his opening speech at that park down there in Austin.

G: Did you attend that?

S: Yes.

G: Did you?

S: And, damn, he had old Maury Maverick and two or three more up there that I didn't like at all.

G: Well, he had quite a spectrum of liberals and conservatives.

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S: Yes, he did.

G: How was he able to do that?

S: I don't know. Johnson was the type of person who, if he liked you, would just go to no ends to help you. And he helped a lot of sorry people and he helped a lot of good people. To Walter Jenkins' eternal credit, even though he got in trouble up there in Washington, anything that Walter would tell you, it was just that way without any ifs, ands, or buts about it.

G: Now, Johnson ran again in 1954 against Dudley Dougherty.

S: Yes. Well, Dudley wasn't even a viable candidate, if that's the word. Dudley just entertained himself.

G: Why didn't big oil put a more serious candidate up against Johnson in 1954?

S: Well, I don't know. I do know that when he got to be president and he and [Ralph] Yarborough had never gotten along, but [Hubert] Humphrey came down here to speak in Houston. Well, I was invited to go down there. The Chairman of the Board of Exxon was sitting on one side of Humphrey for Yarborough, and Denton Cooley and Dr. [Michael] DeBakey were there. I knew both of them--and Marlin Sandlin was there, Major [J. R.] Parten was there.

Incidentally, I helped Johnson in other ways. He got over here at Tyler and he was out of money.

G: Is this 1948?

S: Yes, this is when he was running in 1948. And he couldn't get any money in Houston or exhausted what he had. And I was down there

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staying at the Lamar Hotel. Major Parten had a suite up on the top floor of it, may still live there as far as I know. George Neal, who was then city attorney, an old boy I went to school with, was handling Johnson's campaign in Harris County, or in Houston at least, I guess Harris County. And he had absolutely run out of money. So I talked to Johnson. He called me, or I called him-- I probably called him in Tyler. During the conversation he said, "Do you know of any way to help me raise any money in Houston? I need money bad." I don't think the majors were giving him any money. By the majors, I mean the big oil companies. I said, "Well, I know Major Parten real well and I believe I can get him to give you some money." He said, "Why don't you see him and get him on the phone with me and introduce me to him?"

I went up and called Major Parten and asked him--and this was at night--when it'd be convenient for me to run up there and talk to him a minute. He said, "Well, just any time. I've already had my dinner." So I went up there--he's an old bachelor--and I asked him about Johnson, and he said, "Well, I'm inclined to vote for Johnson." Parten is a liberal. And I said, "Old Stevenson, he's too on the other way, he's too conservative." So I called and I asked him, I said, "Well, would you be willing to help Johnson?" He said, "How much do you think he needs?" And I said, "Well, he'd like to get two thousand dollars from you if he could and give it to George Neal here in Houston to be spent here in Houston." He said, "I'll do that. You call him." I called Johnson over in the

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hotel there in Tyler again, introduced him to Major Parten on the phone and he told him, "Now, I'm going to support you and I'm going to make a two thousand dollar donation to you." We got the check and got it to George the next morning. I helped in ways like that.

G: I understand that you also paid part of the headquarters and other debts around here yourself.

S: I didn't pay part of them, I paid all of them. And when I had reached ten thousand dollars, my wife told me, "Well, this is it. You quit." And I did. Of course, I had known John, John Connally, when he was working for him. John was a good friend of mine.

And after Johnson got in the Senate, I continued to handle his affairs around here for a while. And it got to where every week--and the integration problem got kind of bad, I wasn't for integration at all, and it got kind of bad. These boys were coming by, Jake Pickle would come by, somebody else would come by, somebody else. Finally I told old Monk Willis--we had a party for John Connally out at my house--and I said, "Willis, you're interested in politics and I'm getting older and don't want any job, I don't want anything. I want you to take this job over." And he did, and did a damn good job. Willis was very loyal to Johnson, very loyal to John. John put him on the board up at North Texas [State University].

G: Was Taft-Hartley an issue in 1948?

S: I don't know, but it wasn't an issue here. At that time, I don't think there was any union here unless it was the railroad union.

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- G: Do you recall Roy Hofheinz' role in the 1948 campaign? Was he helpful to Johnson in Houston?
- S: I think he was a friend of Johnson's, but I never did hear him mentioned down there in Houston.
- G: In 1954, Johnson seems to have campaigned the year before in 1953. He came here, I believe, and traveled all over the state. Do you recall that?
- S: I recall all his trips around here. But he made up with Carl Estes.
- G: Did he?
- S: He told me that night, he said, "I'll never speak to that son of a bitch again as long as I live. You and old Ed Clark sure were right." And the first damn time he came to Longview the first place he went was out there--Carl lived between here and the airport. He went by to see him.
- G: Is that right? Well, was Estes a Republican?
- S: No. Estes, as far as I know, was always a Democrat.
- G: One of those letters indicates that he was supporting [Thomas] Dewey in 1948.
- S: He could have done that, but. . . . Estes was a smart crazy person, if you know what I mean.
- G: Were you involved in any of the Texas political convention struggles, such as the 1940 and the [John Nance] Garner forces versus the Roosevelt forces?
- S: No. I was involved in getting some delegates. When they voted and declared Johnson a nominee, I was involved in that.

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G: That was 1956, is that right?

S: I've forgotten the year.

G: The convention fight with Allan Shivers.

S: Willis has told you about that, I imagine. In his convention, I'm talking about the time that he was--is that the same time that he was declared the nominee?

G: Well, favorite son. He headed the delegation.

S: No. I mean the nominee of the Senate where he got that landslide vote, you know. Duval County.

G: Oh, 1948.

S: 1948.

G: Oh, you're talking about the state convention.

S: State convention that had to approve it, approve the returns.

G: Yes. The executive [committee]. Were you there at that [convention]?

S: No. I didn't go, because they wouldn't elect me a delegate, even to the county.

G: Is that right?

S: In this county, on account of the fact that I was close to Johnson. But I went down to Midway--well, not Midway, but below Centerville and talked to one delegate down there and got his promise to vote for Johnson. He was Claude McIver [?]. He's now dead. Then I went to see two or three more who were living and talked to them, because there is where it was decided.

Now, in the Shivers row with Johnson about Democrats, they had a big meeting down here at the junior high school, and Monk Willis,

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myself, B. W. Crain, who's married to the wealthiest woman around this country now and was one of the associate architects on the dome at Houston and a big friend of Frank Erwin--he had Frank up here all the time; we used to go to parties out there--one Negro woman and one white woman were the only ones who stood up for Johnson, and there were three or four hundred people there.

G: Is that right?

S: There's one more person that stood up, and that's R. L. Whitehead. And he made a talk and he said that Merritt Gibson over here was a congenital liar. He was born with the desire to lie, I guess. But there was about six or seven of us that stood up and that was all. The other two or three hundred stood up for Shivers. It was rough here.

G: Well, how did Johnson manage to beat Shivers so badly all over the state, though?

S: Well, this is just an unusual county, I guess. I still say that the two things that contributed to Johnson's unpopularity were, number one, Carl Estes. You see, Carl got in an argument with SWEPCO when we were up at Carl's place at Mineola one Sunday. My wife was there, Julia Acker, who worked for Carl, was there, Seth Parker, S. A. Parker, was there. What had happened is around Johnson's rallies, SWEPCO had men passing out literature for Stevenson. I mean, it was obvious, they were just going through the crowd. So Carl up there that day when we had a little strategy meeting, he called some old man--I've forgotten who he was--that was

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president of the SWEPCO, and he was very rough-talking. He talked to the old man a minute and he said, "Now, I'm going to tell you one thing. If you don't stop your people from putting out that literature of folks that they hire at Johnson's speakings, I'm going to run SWEPCO out of Longview." Old Carl was sitting on a rock fence about as high as this desk, and he was always having heart attacks. I think they were faked, but anyway, he was having them. And this old man evidently told him, said, "Why, you son of a bitch. I'll run that little old yellow sheet you're publishing out of East Texas if you fool with me." And Carl fainted and fell off the damn--dropped the phone and fell off this little brick wall he was sitting on. He was just. . . .

And the Swifty Davis thing, I think that hurt him. See, a third of the population of Longview is black, almost a third of the county is black. And at that time, there were many people here-- I never saw them but I know--that would have joined the Ku Klux [Klan] if they weren't in it. And that was one of the turning points they had against Johnson. They believed this story, that Swifty went with him.

G: Well, did you ever talk to Swifty about it?

S: No.

G: I wonder if it's true?

S: I don't know whether it's true or not, but I wouldn't talk to Swifty because I wouldn't believe anything Swifty said. Swifty had been accused and has never denied it that he picked gold out of the Negro

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bodies that he was undertaking and sold it. Whether he did or not, I don't know. [Preston] Smith appointed him on the mortuary board later on after the Negroes got to be fairly popular.

G: Anything else on Johnson and East Texas politics that you feel is important?

S: No. When he ran for re-election as president after Kennedy was assassinated, I made a bet with Beavers up here, who's the Buick dealer, that Johnson would carry Gregg County by a bigger percentage of the vote than he carried Harris County. And I won it off him.

G: Is that right?

S: Yes. I won a hundred dollars off of him. Now they turned around after Johnson became president, and they supported him. He had good support here, but during that 1948 campaign--if that's the one it was--against Stevenson, they turned against him and stayed against him until such time as he became president. And at that time, everybody got for him.

G: Is there anything that we've left out that you feel is relevant?

S: Well, I don't know of anything other than that while he never did do anything for this county, he never did do anything against it. He had no vendetta--at least he never exercised it. He probably had it, but he didn't exercise it against anybody up here.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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